

Rev. R. Hook

"HEAR THE CHURCH."

A Sermon

PREACHED IN THE CHAPEL ROYAL, ST. JAMES' PALACE,

ON THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY,

JUNE 17, 1838;

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COBOURG, U. C.

PRINTED BY R. D. CHATTERTON, AT THE OFFICE OF THE CHURCH.

MDCXXXIX.

SERMON.

MATTHEW XVIII. 17.

HEAR THE CHURCH.

'This little sanctuary, in which we are now assembled, will always be regarded by the English Churchman with feelings of pious sentiment and respect. Here, from time immemorial, our Sovereigns have worshipped and our Bishops preached ; and these walls were the first which heard the sound of our English Liturgy. Here young Edward imbibed the principles of Divine truth from the lips of Ridley and Cranmer : and here, in the reign of Elizabeth, her Bishops supported by her united firmness, wisdom and piety, manfully upheld the principles of the English Reformation, maintaining the equipoise against the Papists on the one hand, and, on the other, against those ultra-Protestants who were anxious to introduce the foreign system, and to revolutionize religion instead of reforming the church. Here, too, Charles, who died a martyr for the principles of the church—for the Church of England boasts the only royal martyr in the calendar—sought that strength from on high, which enabled him to lay down his "grey discrowned head" upon the block with a blessed peace of mind, which a rebel na-

tion, while depriving him of every thing else, was unable to take away. Here, ever since, by faithful pastors, our British Sovereigns have loyally, dutifully, and respectfully, but, at the same time, I hope with firmness and fearlessness, been reminded of that solemn account they will one day have to render to Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, and the Ruler of princes—here they have been admonished of the awful responsibility of their high office, of the temptations by which they are surrounded, of the example they are bound to set, of their duty as the nursing fathers and nursing mothers of the Church—and here those Sovereigns, in the ordinances and sacraments of the Gospel, have sought for that Divine Grace, of which they have stood in need as much as, yea, from their increased responsibility, from their greater temptations and difficulties, if possible, more than the very meanest of their subjects.

In such a place, then, it cannot be deemed improper, if I briefly lay before you the claims, the character, and the privileges of the church. May God the Holy Spirit be with me while I speak, and with you while you hear ; with me, that I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak ; with you, that you may receive the word with pure affection ; with me that I may not give, with you that you may not take offence.

Now, at the very outset, I must state that

I refer to the church, not as a mere national establishment of religion, but *as* the church—a religious community, intrinsically independent of the state; that is to say, I am about to treat of the church, not in its political, but simply and solely in its religious character.

No one who reads the Bible can for a moment doubt that religion is, or ought to be, a national concern, so long as the Bible contains such awful denunciations against national apostacy and national vice, and while, among the predicted blessings of Christianity, it was foretold as one, that Kings should be the nursing fathers, and Queens the nursing mothers of the Church. And to desire to belong to that religious society which happens to be established in our native land, is a sentiment patriotic, praiseworthy, and honourable. But there is a still further question to be asked; namely, whether the society of Christians established by the government, and invested with certain emoluments and privileges, be a pure branch of that church which was instituted by our blessed Lord and his Apostles? And if it be *not* such, however willing we might be to preserve the peace of society, by refusing to injure a national institution, we should, nevertheless, be amply justified, as religionists, in refusing to conform to it. If the mere fact that a religious society is established by the civil government be sufficient

to claim for it our adhesion, see what the consequence must be ; we should be obliged, on such principles, to become Presbyterians in Scotland and Holland, Papists in France and Italy ; nay, in some parts of the world, worshippers of the mosque, and votaries of Brahma ; whereas, the consistent Protestant could not, of course, conform to the Established Church in France or Italy, until those churches have undergone a thorough reformation ; the consistent English churchman cannot conform to the Presbyterian establishment in Scotland, but in that part of the island attends the services of the Scottish episcopal church, which, though at one time established, was, at the revolution in 1688, from political considerations, deprived of its endowments, which were then given to the community of Presbyterians, which has there become the established religion.

Bless God, then, we may, that the true church is established here in England : and that, while as patriots we would support its establishment for our country's good, we can also, as Christians, conscientiously conform to it ; yet it is not on the ground that it is established by the state, but on grounds much higher and holier than these, that in this sacred place we are to state its claims. So entirely independent is the church (as the church) of the state, that were all connexion between church and state at this very moment to cease (though we may be sure

the monarchy would be destroyed), the church, as the church, would continue precisely as she now is : that is to say, our Bishops, though deprived of temporal rank, would still exercise all those spiritual functions, which, conferred by higher than human authority, no human authority can take away ; still to the vacant sees they would consecrate new Bishops, still ordain the Clergy, still confirm the baptised, still govern the church ; our priests, assisted by the deacons, would still administer the sacraments, and preach the Gospel ; our Liturgy, even though we were driven to upper rooms of our towns, or to the very caves of the desert, would still be solemnized. We may be sure of this, for this very thing has happened in times past. When the United States of America were English Colonies, the English Church was there established : at the revolution, the state was destroyed. Monarchy has there ceased to exist ; but the church, though depressed for a time, remained uninjured : so that there,—among the American republicans—under the superintendence of no fewer than sixteen bishops, you will find her sacraments and ordinances administered, and all her ritual and liturgical services celebrated with not less of piety, zeal and solemnity, than here in England ; there you may see the church, like an oasis in the desert, blessed by the dews of heaven, and shedding heavenly blessings around her,

in a land where, because no religion is established, if it were not for her, nothing but the extremes of infidelity or fanaticism would prevail.

And so you may perceive what is meant, when we say that we wish to speak of the church, not as an establishment, but as *the* church, a religious society, a particular society of Christians.

We will commence with an indisputable fact. In this country there is at the present time a religious society, known by the name of the church. The question is, when and by whom was this society instituted?

Now the Roman Catholics or Papists assert that it was instituted and founded, like the generality of Protestant sects, by certain reformers in the sixteenth century, and thence they would deduce a strong argument against us. They would ask us whether any man can take unto himself the office of the ministry, unless he be sent by God; and if we are Scriptural Christians, if we take the Bible for our guide, if we act on the sound Protestant principle, with the fifth chapter to the Hebrews open before us, we must answer, no. Then they proceed to ask, how can *you* prove that your ministers are called of God to the office. And if their assertion were true that our church was founded at the reformation, we could give them no answer at all.

But at the period of the reformation, when Cranmer and Ridley flourished, there was a

church existing and established in England, and as Archbishop of that church, Cranmer, our celebrated reformer, was consecrated.—That church had existed, as all parties admit, from the first planting of Christianity in England. But Archbishop Cranmer found that in his time, it had become in certain respects corrupted; that the Bishop of Rome, for example, had usurped over it an authority and influence which he did not possess by right; that many practices prevailed, some of them contrary to Scripture, and some of them much abused to superstition; such as the worshipping of saints and images and the use of the Liturgy in a language not understood by the people,—while opinions were prevalent (such as those relating to Transubstantiation), decidedly erroneous, which the church did not protest against, but, on the contrary, rather seemed to sanction. Now when once these errors were pointed out and proved to be unscriptural, our divines would have been guilty of heresy had they pertinaciously adhered to them. Before the Reformation, those who adhered to them were *not* guilty of heresy, for they held the doctrines which (ever since the Reformation) we have renounced, from a mere error of fact. They supposed them to be revealed doctrines, and therefore they, in humble faith, received them; *we*, on the contrary, have ascertained that these doctrines were not revealed, and therefore, in-

fluenced by the same faith, we reject them; so that it was by one and the self-same principle, that both before and since the Reformation, the true members of the Church of England have been actuated. They said, and we say precisely the same, whatsoever is revealed, that we will not question, but believe. But as to the fact, whether this or that doctrine was revealed, they were less cautious than we are now; we who perhaps err on the very side of caution.

But to return to the Archbishop and the Prelates who aided him in the work of Reformation. They discovered that all the errors which they detected in their church were innovations gradually and imperceptibly introduced, and not belonging originally or essentially to the Church of England; that, even in the seventh century, five councils were held in England, when the doctrines denounced by the Reformers were unknown. What, then, did the Archbishop and his associates determine to do? They determined, as they had an undoubted right so to do, not to overthrow the old church and establish a Protestant sect in its place, but merely to reform, to correct abuses in the existing church. And, aided by the civil powers, this they did, by asserting, first, their own independence as Bishops against the usurped authority of the Pope, who had no more authority of right in England, than the Bishop of Canterbury had in Rome: by

discontinuing practices which led evidently to unscriptural superstitions ; by protesting against certain prevalent erroneous doctrines ; by translating the Scriptures and the ancient ritual and liturgy, which latter, (the ritual and liturgy we still retain,) besides translating, they re-arranged. But, though they did this, they still remained the same bishops and divines of the same church. An attempt was made to revive the old superstitions in Queen Mary's reign, but, by the pious firmness of Elizabeth, her Bishops were enabled to complete the work so happily commenced in the reigns of her father and brother.

Now, from this historical statement, you see the absurdity of which the Papists are guilty when they accuse us of having deserted or dissented from the old church, and of having reared a new church of human origin—the absurdity of their speaking of theirs as the old church and the old religion.

About two years ago, this very chapel in which we are now assembled was repaired, certain disfigurements removed, certain improvements made : would it not be absurd, on that account, to contend that it is no longer the Chapel Royal ? Would it not be still more absurd if some one were to build a new chapel in the neighborhood, imitating closely what this chapel was five years ago, and carefully piling up all the dust and rubbish which was at that time swept from

hence, and then pronounce *that*, not *this*, to be the ancient chapel of the Sovereigns of England? The absurdity is at once apparent; but this is precisely what has been done by the Roman Catholic or Papist. The present Church of England is the old Catholic Church of England, reformed in the reigns of Henry, Edward and Elizabeth, of certain superstitious errors; it is the same church which came down from our British and Saxon ancestors, and, as such, it possesses its original endowments, which were never, as ignorant persons foolishly suppose, taken from one church and given to another. The church remained the same after it was reformed as it was before, just as a man remains the same man after he has washed his face as he was before; just as Naaman, the leper, remained the same Naaman after he was cured of his leprosy as he was before. And so regularly, so canonically, was the reformation conducted, that even those who thought no reformation requisite, still remained for a time in the Church; they did not consider what was done (though they did not approve of it) sufficient to drive them into a schism. It was not till the 12th year of Queen Elizabeth's reign that, listening to the exhortations of the Pope, they quitted the church and formed a new sect. from which the present Romish dissenters have descended, and in which were retained all those errors in opinion and practice, all that

rubbish which the Catholic Church in England had at the reformation corrected and swept away. Let it always be remembered that the English Romanists separated from us, not we from them: we did not go out from them, but they from us. The slightest acquaintance with that neglected branch of learning, ecclesiastical history, will convince us of this. They left the Church of England, to which they originally belonged, because they thought their Bishops had reformed too much, had become too Protestant; just as Protestant dissenters left us because they thought we had not reformed enough; that we were, as they still style us, too Popish. The one party left us because they wanted no reform, the other because, instead of a reformation, they wished a religious revolution,—the Reformers of the Church of England carefully preserved a middle path.

The Church of England, then, that church to which we belong, is the old catholic church originally planted in this country. But the founders of the church of England—remember I do not mean the reformers—for nothing but ignorance, the most gross, will speak of them as our founders; ignorance, which concedes to the Papists an argument of the very greatest importance—the founders, or planters of the Church of England, both Britons and Saxons, were bishops ordained by other bishops, precisely as is the case at

the present time: the catalogue has been carefully and providentially preserved from the beginning. And the Bishops who ordained them had been ordained by other bishops, and so back to the apostles, who ordained the first bishops, being themselves ordained by Christ. This is what is called the doctrine of the apostolic succession;—which is a doctrine of considerable importance. For unless the ministers of the Gospel are sent by Christ, what right have they to act in his name? If we were passing through a foreign land, we might be perfectly competent to act as ambassador for the Queen of England; but would any foreign potentate receive us as such, unless we could produce our credentials? Many a lawyer may be as well *qualified* to perform the duties of the Lord Chancellor as the Chancellor himself, but is he able to *act* as Chancellor? No, certainly not, unless he has first received a commission from his sovereign. And so with respect to religion. What right has a man to take upon himself to act as God's ambassador, unless God has commissioned him so to act? An eloquent man he may be, and one mighty in the scriptures, but he has no authority to speak in God's name, until God has given him that authority. How, asks St. Paul, shall they preach—*i. e.* preach lawfully, except they be sent—*i. e.* sent by God? No man, says scripture, taketh this honour to himself, but

he that is called of God. Nay, even Christ, says the Apostle, glorified not Himself to be made an high priest, but he that said unto Him "thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,"—even He entered not on his ministerial office until He was externally appointed thereto.

As the Lord Jesus Christ was sent by the Father, so were the apostles sent by him.—"As my Father hath sent me," He says, soon after his resurrection, "even so send I you." Now how had the father sent him? He had sent him to act as his supreme minister on earth; as such to appoint under Him subordinate ministers, and to do what He then did; when his work on earth was done, to hand on his commission to others. The apostles, in like manner, were sent by Christ to act as his chief ministers in the church, to appoint subordinate ministers under them, and then, as he had done, to hand on their commission to others. And on this commission, after our Lord had ascended up on high, the apostles proceeded to act. They formed their converts into churches; these churches consisted of baptised believers, to officiate among whom subordinate ministers, priests and deacons were ordained, while the apostle who first formed any particular church exercised over it episcopal superintendence, either holding an occasional visitation, by sending for the clergy to meet him (as St. Paul summoned to Miletus the clergy

of Ephesus), or else transmitting to them those pastoral addresses which, under the name of epistles, form so important a portion of holy Scripture.

At length, however, it became necessary for the Apostles to proceed yet further, and to do as their Lord had empowered them to do—to hand on their commission to others, that at their own death the Governors of the church might not be extinct. Of this we have an instance in Titus, who was placed in Crete by St. Paul, to act as chief pastor or bishop, and another in Timothy, who was in like manner set over the church of Ephesus. And when Timothy was thus appointed to the office of chief pastor he was associated with Paul, who, in writing to the Philippians, commences his salutation thus :—"Paul and Timotheus to the servants of Jesus Christ who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."

Now we have here the three orders of the ministry clearly alluded to. The title of bishop is, to be sure, given to the second order ; but it is not for words, but for things, that we are to contend. Titles may change while offices remain : so senators exist, tho' they are not now of necessity old men ; and most absurd would it be to contend that when we speak of the Emperor Constantine, we can mean no other office than that held under the Roman republic, because we find Cicero also saluted as Emperor.

So stood the matter in the apostolic age, when the chief pastors of the church were generally designated apostles or angels, *i. e.* messengers sent by God himself. In the next century, the office remaining, the designation of those who held it was changed, the title of apostle was confined to the twelve, including St. Paul; and the chief pastors who succeeded them were thenceforth called bishops, the subordinate ministers being styled priests and deacons. And thus we see, as Christ was sent by the Father, so he sent the apostles; as the apostles were sent by Christ, so did they send the first race of bishops; as the first race of bishops was sent by the apostles, so they sent the second race of bishops, the second the third, and so down to our present Bishops, who can thus trace their spiritual descent from St. Peter and St. Paul, and prove their divine authority to govern the churches over which they are canonically appointed to preside. Like the Apostles they have the right to appoint under them the subordinate ministers; and so, let the Papists say what they will, the clergy of England can establish their right by commission from Christ to minister in sacred things.

Such was originally the constitution not of one or two churches only, but of the church universal—the church Catholic. Against the church so constituted in various places sectarians arose, even in the apostolic age.—

These sects were generally, like modern sects, distinguished by the names of their founders. But true Churches disdained to be called after any human being whatever, since of them Christ was the author and finisher. The Episcopal churches persevering in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, were styled collectively the catholic church ; and in order to distinguish it from the surrounding sects, the true orthodox church in any particular country was sometimes called a branch of the catholic church, sometimes the catholic church of that place, and hence the term catholic came, by degrees, to signify (as Bishop Beveridge remarks) much the same as our term orthodox—the orthodox church, and orthodox members of the same—that church which adhered to the scriptural discipline and doctrine universally received, as distinguished from the discipline invented, and the doctrine propounded, by individual teachers.

You see here, by the way, the folly, (if it be not a sin, for it is calling 'evil good, and good evil') of styling the Romish dissenters in England, as some persons in extreme ignorance, and others perhaps with bad intentions, do, Catholics ; for this insinuates, that we of the church of England are heretics, whereas you have seen that ours, not theirs, is the true and orthodox church of Christ in this country, the real catholic church, in and of England. If they dislike the name of Papist, we may speak of them as Romanists, or even Roman

catholics. Roman catholics they may be styled, for (though schismatics and dissenters in England,) in France, and Italy, they belong to a church true by descent, though corrupted by Roman or Popish superstitions. A bad man is still a man, and you may refuse to associate with him before he reforms—but still you will never permit him so to style himself a man as to imply that you yourself are an inhuman being.

Pure in its doctrine, apostolic in its discipline, and edifying in its ceremonies, this catholic and apostolic church diffused its blessings, and preserved its purity for many hundred years. In the middle ages it existed, still working good and administering grace according to the exigence of the times; emitting a ray of light when all around was dark. But the surrounding ignorance and gloom prevented the detection of various corruptions and disfigurements which by degrees crept into it, until, in the 16th century, the sun of learning having dawned upon Europe, its defects in this country began to betray themselves too obviously to be any longer tolerated. Of these defects, so far as the English branch of the church was concerned, the bishops of the church of England, as I have before stated, by degrees became aware, and while they venerated the fabric which apostles had reared, and of which Christ himself was the chief corner stone, they carefully removed the incrustations which disfigured it,

and sweeping away the rubbish by which it had been overlaid, displayed the real rock upon which it had been built. Thus was the Catholic and Apostolic church, of which we profess our belief in the creeds, rescued in England from Popish domination, and (reformed or brought back to its primitive purity, dignified in its simplicity) it retained the ministry in regular succession from the apostles, and a ritual and liturgy which can themselves in great part be traced back to the apostolic age.

Although causelessly to separate from such a church must be a schismatical act, yet we do not uncharitably pronounce sentence of condemnation upon those who have by circumstances over which they have had no control, been brought up without its pale. In error, of course, we believe them to be, but certainly not in such error, from that circumstance, as to endanger their salvation: and if we suppose them, as we must do, to lack our privileges, this ought only to make us respect them the more if at any time we find them (with fewer advantages) surpassing us in godliness. We do not confine God's grace and favour to the church; for we remember that though Job was not a member of the then Church of God, still he was a man eminently pious and highly favoured; we remember that though Balaam was not in the church, yet he was an inspired prophet; we remember that Jethro also, the father-in-law of Mo-

ses, though not a proselyte to Israel (and the church at that time was confined to the Israelites) was yet a servant of God ; we remember, that the Rechabites were actually commended by God at the very time He passed censure upon those who were then his church—the people of Israel.

Remembering all this, we say not that other denominations of Christians are cast out from the mercy of God through the Saviour because they belong not to the church ; all that we say is, that it does not follow that these concessions must render void the divine appointment of the church, the divine command to all nations, and of course to all mankind, to be united with it, or the scriptural evidence for episcopacy as the divinely sanctioned organization of its ministry—and we contend, that a treasure having been committed to us, we are not to undervalue it lest we should offend others, but are to preserve it in its purity, and in all its integrity to transmit it to our children and our children's children.

And let me ask, is *not* the privilege of belonging to a church thus orthodox in its doctrine, and true by descent thus both Catholic *and* Protestant, a privilege for which we should be deeply grateful to the providence and grace of God ? And will not the account we shall have to render be awful, if we neglect, despise, or forego, the advantages thus placed within our reach ?

Let us ever remember, that the primary

object for which the church was instituted by Christ, its author and finisher, and for which the apostolical succession of its ministers was established,—that the primary object for which, through ages of persecution, and ages of prosperity, and ages of darkness, and ages of corruption, and ages of Latitudinarianism, and now in an age of rebuke and blasphemy, now when we have fallen on evil days and evil tongues, the primary object for which the church has still been preserved by a providential care, marvellous sometimes, if not miraculous in our eyes, was, and is to convey supernaturally the saving merits of the atoning blood of the Lamb of God, and the sanctifying graces of his Holy Spirit, to the believer's soul. In the church it is, that the appointed means are to be found by which that mysterious union with Christ is promoted in which our spiritual life exists—in her it is, that the third person of the blessed Trinity abideth for ever, gradually to change the hearts of sinful man, and to make that flesh which he finds stone—gradually to prepare us for heaven, while our ascended Saviour is preparing heaven for us. And, oh! my brethren, what a privilege it is to have this well of living waters, in which you may wash and be clean! You know that you are sinful creatures, very far gone from righteousness; you know that your condition is such that you cannot turn and prepare yourselves by your own natural strength and good works to faith

and calling upon God ; you know that by nature you cannot love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and strength ; you cannot discharge the various duties of your various situations in life ; you know that whatever your condition now may be, the hour must come of affliction and sorrow, of sickness and sadness, the inevitable hour of death ; and the church is instituted to convey to you pardon upon your repentance, and grace in time of need ; it is instituted to instruct you in your ignorance, to comfort you in your sorrows, to elevate you in your devotions, to bring you into communion with your Saviour, your Sanctifier, your God ; to prepare you for the hour of death, yea, for the day of judgment ; and this she chiefly does through the Gospel, and other divinely-appointed ordinances of religion, if of them you will but avail yourselves.

But this is not all ; while the church thus ministers grace to individuals, it is part of her business to preserve, hand down and proclaim the truth, the whole truth, as it is in Jesus. And our duty, therefore, it is—especially if we happen by God's providence to be called to situations of influence, rank or authority—by all the means in our power to increase her efficiency in this respect, to place her on the watch-tower, that her voice may be heard thro' the length and breadth of the land ; our duty it is, to take care that her faith be preserved intact and pure ; our

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duty it is, to vindicate her from the glosses of ignorance, and the misrepresentations of prejudice and malice; our duty it is, clearly to define, and zealously to maintain, those peculiar doctrines ~~and~~ that peculiar discipline, which have always marked, and do still continue to mark, the distinction between the church of Christ, administered under the superintendence of chief pastors, or bishops, who have regularly succeeded to the apostles, from those sects of Christianity which exist under self-appointed teachers.

Against the church the world seems at this time to be set in array. To be a true and faithful member of the church requires no little moral courage. Basely to pretend to belong to her, while designing mischief against her in the heart, is easy enough; but manfully to contend for her because she is the church, a true church, a pure church, a holy church, this is difficult to those who court the praise of men or fear the censure of the world. May the great God of heaven, may Christ the great Bishop and Shepherd of souls, who is over all things in the church, put it, my brethren, into your hearts and minds to say and feel (as I do) "as for me and my house, we will live in the church, we will die in the church, and if need shall be, like our martyred forefathers, we will die for the church."